

Fish Consumption Advisory for Carp from Utah Lake, Utah County

Elevated PCB levels have been found in Carp from Utah Lake in Utah County, prompting the Utah Department of Health, in conjunction with the Utah Department of Environmental Quality, Utah Department of Natural Resources, and Utah County Health Department, to issue a fish consumption advisory. The advisory recommends that adults limit their consumption of carp taken from Utah Lake to no more than one 8-ounce serving per month. Women who may become pregnant, pregnant women, nursing mothers, and young children should not eat carp from Utah Lake. This advisory is based on analyses of fish tissue taken from Utah Lake.

Filets from carp taken from Utah Lake by the UDNR in late 2005 were tested for PCBs and other chemicals. The data were assessed and the advisories issued based on risk-assessment methods developed by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Results of the assessment show that consumption of carp from Utah Lake above the consumption advisory limit over a long period of time could result in an intake of PCBs that could cause adverse health effects, particularly in young children and pregnant women. Although no known illnesses have been associated with consuming fish from Utah Lake, studies based on long-term consumption have identified PCBs as a known toxic compound. It is important to note that the health risk associated with eating the contaminated fish is based on long-term consumption and not tied to eating fish occasionally. There is no health risk associated with other uses of the lake, such as swimming, boating, and waterskiing.

Fish consumption advisory signs will be posted at access points to Utah Lake. In addition, information about the advisory and about the health effects of PCBs can be found at: <http://health.utah.gov/enviroepi/>.

The agencies will continue to monitor contaminant levels of fish in Utah Lake and will update the advisories, as needed, based on additional information. Other species of fish in Utah Lake will be tested for PCB levels.

Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) are mixtures of up to 209 individual chlorinated compounds. PCBs are man-made chemicals that have been used as coolants and lubricants in transformers, capacitors, and other electrical equipment. The manufacture of PCBs in the U.S. was stopped in 1977 due to evidence that they build up in the environment and can cause harmful health effects. In the past, PCBs have entered the air, soil, and water during their manufacture, from accidental spills, and leaks and fires in products and equipment containing PCBs. Although no longer produced in this country, PCBs can still enter the environment from hazardous waste sites, illegal and improper disposal of PCBs, and leaks from old electrical transformers containing PCBs. PCBs take a long time to break down in the environment. In water, most stick to organic particles and bottom sediments. PCBs are taken up by small organisms and fish in water. People can be exposed to PCBs by eating these contaminated fish. Fish that feed on the

bottom lake sediments, such as the carp in Utah Lake, will tend to have higher levels of PCBs.

Studies in animals have shown that PCBs can affect the immune, endocrine, and reproductive systems. These effects are uncertain in humans. PCBs are not known to cause birth defects. The U.S. EPA classifies PCBs as “probable” human carcinogens, but there is no evidence that PCBs cause cancer in humans at the low levels usually found in the environment. PCBs accumulate in fatty tissue. PCBs are eliminated from the body very slowly and levels can build up in the body over time.

Because PCBs accumulate in fat, exposure to PCBs from fish can be reduced by removing the skin and fat from fish filets. Fish should be cooked by broiling, baking, or grilling so that the fat drains away from the meat. Using these cooking methods allow the PCBs contained in the fat to be removed from the filet. Avoid using fish drippings or broth as they may contain higher PCB levels. Eat smaller, younger fish. Larger, older fish tend to have higher levels of PCBs. This doesn't mean that you should stop eating fish. It is important to consider the benefits of eating fish as part of a balanced diet. Fish are a good source of readily digestible protein. They are low in fat and sodium, and the unique types of fats found in fish are believed to provide cardiovascular benefits to humans. You can still get the benefits of eating fish by using moderation in how much you eat.

This investigation was conducted in cooperation with state and local agencies. Contacts for each agency follow:

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